



EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

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The Honorable Mazie Hirono
U.S. Senate
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator Hirono,

In this time of great need, I am writing to thank you for your introduction of the Covering our FAS Allies Act (S. 2218) and your continued leadership in sending your recent bicameral, bipartisan letter to Congressional leadership urging the inclusion of this provision in upcoming legislation to address the economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is proud of our special and unique relationship with the United States. Through our Compact of Free Association, the U.S. has full authority and responsibility for RMI national security and operates the preeminent Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on our Kwajalein Atoll.

Our Compact also permits Marshallese citizens to work, live, and study in the United States without a visa, as legal nonimmigrants. Our young men and women serve in the U.S. military, volunteering at per capita rates higher than many U.S. states.

In 1996, Congress passed sweeping welfare reform legislation that had the unintended effect of ending Medicaid eligibility for Marshallese citizens legally residing in the U.S. under the terms of our Compact. This omission is having serious consequences today. To date, there are 60 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our Marshallese communities throughout the United States, including Hawaii. Six of these have succumbed to the illness.

As the U.S. and RMI confront the global pandemic as allies, it is important that our people have the resources to treat the COVID-19 virus and stop its spread. The danger we face today has exposed the serious consequences of omitting U.S. based citizens from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (and our fellow Freely Associated States of Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia) from the federal Medicaid program in Hawaii and across the country.

Our reinstatement in the federal Medicaid program is critical not just from a public health perspective but also as a basic matter of diplomacy to honor the terms and spirit of our Compact.

Your continued leadership on this matter is greatly appreciated.

Since ,

Gerald M. Zackios
Ambassador